

# Set Limits For Your Child With Love



## Discipline

CALIFORNIA  
**CHILDREN  
& FAMILIES**  
PARTNERSHIP

A Partnership of the  
California Children & Families Commission  
and the Children & Families County Commissions

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## Tips For Setting Limits With Your Child

- **Have routines.** Babies and children need to sleep and eat at regular times.
- **Meet your baby's needs.** Your baby cries when he or she is tired, hungry or needs something. Try to figure out what is needed and respond in a loving way.
- **Keep your child safe.** Babies and small children are curious. Keep harmful things away from your child.
- **Redirect your child's attention.** When your child does something you do not like, help your child find something else to do. Tell a story, sing a song, or give other toys.
- **Be sure to tell your child that you love him or her, even when your child does something wrong.** Explain that you just don't like what your child is doing.
- **Praise your child.** Telling children they have done something right makes them feel good about themselves.
- **Do not hit or hurt your child.** Shaking, spanking, hitting or shouting at children does not help them learn. If anything, it teaches that hitting is a way to deal with anger. When you shake your baby or young child, it can cause brain damage or death.
- **Have a plan for when your baby cries a lot.** Try to keep calm and understand what your baby needs.
- **If you feel frustrated or angry, take deep breaths and count to 10.** Ask someone else to watch your baby. Take your baby for a walk or ride. Never touch your baby in anger.



## You Can Set Limits With Love

When you set limits for your child, you help your child grow into a happy, healthy person. Setting limits:

- Helps children learn how to set their own limits.
- Helps their self-esteem.
- Gives children the tools for a healthy and good life.
- Teaches children self-control.

Discipline is teaching, not punishing. It is not to just get your child to do something differently. It is also a time to praise what your child does right.

This booklet tells you what you can expect for each age. It will help you set the right limits as your child grows and changes.

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## When Your Baby Is Newborn To 8 Months Old

### **Meet your baby's needs.**

When you meet the needs of your baby every day, you show love and caring. This helps your child to know he or she can depend on you. Children need to feel safe. They need to know there is order in the world.

### **You cannot spoil your baby by giving him or her too much attention.**

Babies need lots of love and care. When your baby cries, he or she is asking for your help.

- Feed your baby when hungry.
- Change your baby when needed.
- Comfort your baby when he or she cries.
- Tell your baby that you love him or her.
- Play gently with your baby.
- Never hit or shake your baby.

## When Your Baby Is 8 To 9 Months Old

### **Keep your baby safe.**

At this age your baby has a lot of energy and is very curious.

Your baby likes to:

- Touch.
- Move.
- Taste.
- Explore.



### **This is how your baby learns and grows.**

Your job is to set limits that keep your baby safe:

- Keep medicines out of reach.
- Keep things that break easily out of the way.
- Cover outlet sockets.
- Use baby gates on stairs and doorways to keep your baby safe.
- Put safety locks on cupboards, drawers and toilets.

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## When Your Baby Is 9 To 12 Months Old

**Help your baby know what is OK and not OK.**

At this age your baby will explore even more. Let your baby know what is and isn't allowed. When your baby does something that is dangerous or that you do not like, you can:

- Say a calm "no."
- Help your baby find something else to play with.
- Read a book or sing to your baby.

Do not shake, hit or yell at your baby.



## When Your Child Is 1 To 2 Years Old

**At this age your child:**

- Is getting more independent.
- May start to test limits.
- May sometimes not want to sleep or eat when he or she needs to.
- May have temper tantrums from time to time.

**You can help your child get the sleep he or she needs.**

- Stick to a regular routine. Have your toddler take naps and go to sleep at the same time every night.
- A routine helps your child to fall asleep more easily. It also helps children to go back to sleep.

**Do quiet things before bed. You can:**

- Read books.
- Sing songs.
- Cuddle and talk.

Don't let your child get wound up or excited before bedtime.

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## You Can Help Your Child Eat Well

Toddlers are often picky eaters. One day they might not like one food. The next day they may love the same food. To make mealtimes easier, you can:

- Feed your child different kinds of healthy foods every day.
- Serve small amounts. When children are hungry, they will ask for more.
- Let your child decide how much to eat from the foods you serve.
- Let your child help in the kitchen.
- Let your child feed himself or herself, even though it might be messy.

### These pointers can also help:

- Do not force your child to eat. Your child may be full.
- Keep calm at mealtimes. Do not yell or scream at your child.
- Don't expect your child to sit through a whole meal.
- Be patient. Enjoy your child's company at meals.

## You Can Help Your Child When He Or She Has Tantrums

Tantrums or "meltdowns" are normal for children at one to two years of age. Children have tantrums when they feel out of control or are over-stimulated.

It helps to:

- Stay calm—it will help calm your child. The more upset you get, the more likely your child will stay upset.
- Make sure your child is safe and can't get hurt.
- Tell your child you are going to leave the area, but will be close by.
- Give your child a chance to calm down.

### After your child calms down:

- Tell him or her that you understand about being angry and upset.
- Let your child know you didn't like how he or she was acting.



Talking about it helps your child to understand his or her own feelings. It teaches your child how to learn self-control.

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## You Can Help When Your Child Has A Tantrum In Public

**Public tantrums can be very upsetting.** Children have tantrums for many reasons. They may be tired, over-excited, or want something they cannot have. Or they may want their parent's attention. To deal with a tantrum you can:

- Stay calm. If you get angry, the tantrum may last longer.
- Do not yell at your child or say they are bad. This hurts them too.
- Let your child know that it is not OK to act that way.
- Calmly take your child away from the area.
- If you have to, take your child to the car. Stay with your child while he or she finishes the tantrum.
- Let your child know "I don't like what you're doing right now, but I still love you."

## When Your Child Is 2 To 3 Years Old

**At this age your child:**

- Can say what he or she wants and how he or she feels.
- Can argue and bargain with you.
- Knows if you really mean what you say.

**You can be clear and exact when you set limits.**

- Explain what you want in simple words.
- Tell them what they can do, not just what they can't do.
- Suggest other ways to act. If your child throws a toy truck, say that it is not okay. But it is okay to play with the truck on the floor.
- Praise your child for things he or she does right.

Children need to know their parents care about them.



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## Do Not Spank Or Hit Your Child

It's normal to be upset when a child does not do what you want or annoys you. But even when you are angry, it is not okay to shake, hit or shame your child.

Children do not have to be hurt to learn. Hitting and yelling may stop what they are doing. But it tells children that it is alright to hit and hurt someone when you are angry. Hitting may cause children to feel helpless, ashamed and angry. That anger may be used against others later.

### Instead of spanking or yelling you can:

- Deal with the problem right away. Help your child understand what he or she did wrong.
- Give your child a "time-out." A time-out gives you and your child a chance to calm down. It also gives you both time to think about what happened.
- Tell your child that you did not like what he or she did, but you still love him or her.
- Talk with your child about what to do the next time. This helps your child set his or her own limits.
- Time-outs should not be used as punishment.

## Calm Yourself

You may get frustrated and angry with a crying baby. **NEVER** touch a baby in anger. Try these things to calm yourself:

- Take your baby out of the house for a ride in a stroller or a car.
- Leave your baby in a safe, secure place. Go to another room. Take deep breaths and count to 10. Wait until you calm down.
- Ask someone else you trust to watch your baby for you. This can be a parent, a neighbor or a friend.

- Seek counseling or help when needed. It is OK to ask for help. Both you and your baby will be happier.



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## Learn About Shaken Baby Syndrome

People need to know how harmful it is to shake a baby. Babies are hurt badly when they are shaken. This is called **Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS)**. It often happens when a parent or caregiver tries to make a baby or young child stop crying. The adult gets angry or frustrated and shakes the baby. Shaking a baby can cause brain damage or even death.

Make sure you tell anyone who takes care of your baby or young child not to shake him or her. This includes:

- Friends and family members.
- Babysitters or caregivers.

Never, ever let anyone shake your baby. It can be very dangerous.

## It Is Dangerous To Shake A Baby

Babies and young children up to age 5 have weak neck muscles. The muscles cannot support the head very well. When a baby is shaken, it hurts the baby's brain. The brain slams against the skull wall. That can badly hurt a baby. One out of four babies with Shaken Baby Syndrome die from it.

**A baby who is shaken can:**

- Have difficulty talking and have learning disabilities.
- Get cerebral palsy.
- Become blind.
- Have seizures.
- Become mentally retarded.
- Die.





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## What You Can Do When Your Baby Cries

**Plan what to do with your baby when your baby cries a lot. Here are some ideas:**

- Breastfeed your baby. Or give your baby a bottle or pacifier.
- Change your baby's diaper.
- Rock your baby.
- Walk with your baby.
- Dance or cuddle with your baby.
- Massage your baby.

**Your baby may not feel well.**

- Check to see if your baby is sick. Check for a fever.
- Check to see if your baby is teething. Look for swollen gums.

## Get Medical Care Right Away If Your Child Was Shaken

- Take your child to the emergency room or your doctor.
- Tell your doctor what happened. That way the doctor can give your child the best care.

**Don't let guilt, fear or shame stop you.**

- Get care for your baby right away. It may save your baby's life.
- It may keep your baby from having serious health problems.



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## Special Thanks

Special thanks to Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, who graciously granted permission to the California Children and Families Partnership to use his national bestseller, *Touchpoints: The Essential Reference*, as a primary resource for the development of this booklet.

## Where You Can Find Help

For more information, call these toll-free numbers:

Childhelp USA Child Abuse Hotline  
**(800) 4A-CHILD**

California Consortium to Prevent Child Abuse  
**(800) CHILDREN**

National Information, Support and Referral Service on Shaken Baby Syndrome

**(888) 273-0071**

[www.capcenter.org](http://www.capcenter.org)

Brought to you by the California Children and Families Commission. Funded by Prop 10.  
For more information, please call **(800) KIDS-025**.

